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Brussels, 27 January 2006

Report of Pax Christi International “Seeking Peace in Colombia” Executive Summary

1. Context

Seeking to deepen its commitment to peace and human rights in Colombia, Pax Christi International organised five visits to Colombia between September 2002 and July 2005, which are detailed in this report.¹ The aim of this report is to achieve five objectives: (1) review key aspects of the present reality in Colombia with emphasis on the continuous conflict and its effects on the victims of the violence and those who work with these victims; (2) support the efforts of the Catholic Church in Colombia to end the conflict through non-violent means and promote peace and justice. Pax Christi undertakes this effort particularly in partnership with Colombian national and regional offices of Pastoral Social (SNPS); (3) develop contacts with Colombian and international NGOs actively working for peace and justice in Colombia, including CRS Colombia, and explore possibilities for further collaboration with CIDSE, Caritas *Internationalis* and others; (4) support peace-building initiatives in Colombia including those of *Redepaz*²; and (5) coordinate the work of the Pax Christi member organisations relative to Colombia and especially Pax Christi advocacy on Colombia with governments and intergovernmental organizations.

As a Catholic peace movement, Pax Christi International’s work is rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and Catholic social teaching. This report gives special status and emphasis to the perspectives and experiences of those who suffer most as the direct result of a prolonged period of conflict. This report also gives attention, though not exclusively, to the contributions of the Catholic Church and its efforts towards achieving peace, reconciliation, and healing.

Pax Christi International visited Colombia to express its solidarity with the hopes, desires, and suffering of the people of Colombia, caused by extreme violence and poverty. The main delegation to Colombia consisted of participants from Latin America, Europe and the United States. In addition to the delegates, several national sections as well as other members and friends of Pax Christi contributed to the research in preparing this report.

Pax Christi International expresses its gratitude to Cardinal Pedro Rubiano, Monsignor Hector Fabio Henao, and the dedicated women and men of the Office of Pastoral Social who generously assisted the delegation at every step of the journey. While we acknowledge that this report would not have been possible without their assistance, Pax Christi International takes full responsibility for the opinions and conclusions expressed in this document.

¹ Two preliminary visits took place in September 2002 and April 2004. The main fact finding visit was scheduled in July 2004. Two follow-up visits took place in May and July 2005.

² *Redepaz* is the “National Network of Initiatives for Peace and Against War in Colombia” and is since 1 November 2005 a member organisation with Pax Christi International.

2. Findings and Recommendations

Through its visits and its research, Pax Christi reaffirms once again its commitment to non-violence as the only effective means of bringing an end to this long-enduring conflict. These non-violent strategies must be multi-dimensional to be effective since the conflict itself is multi-dimensional. The goals of these strategies must be to stop the war and provide for security and justice for the peoples of Colombia, put an end to all armed actions by the guerrillas and the paramilitaries, to human rights violations by state actors and to the violence caused by common delinquency. Any strategy used must be carried out without impunity for the perpetrators and while respecting the human rights of all. These strategies must also provide viable economic opportunities for the victims of the conflict and political participation and stability for all of Colombia's population including those most vulnerable groups: the indigenous, women, and children. Finally, these strategies must provide care for the victims and bring an end to the severe humanitarian crisis being experienced within the country. While the government has a significant role to play in halting the violence, Pax Christi also acknowledges and promotes the unique role of civil society organisations in non-violent civilian resistance and especially the role of the Catholic Church in helping to bring about an ultimate solution to the conflict.

Pax Christi International supports the efforts of the Pastoral Social:

1. To end the conflict
 - a. by being actively involved in peace negotiations in collaboration with other actors, and
 - b. by continuing its work with priests and pastoral and religious agents to develop the ability to be effective agents for peace and reconciliation. Pax Christi particularly encourages such efforts in those parishes and regions of the country where Catholic religious leaders have been less involved and even resistant to such efforts.
2. To end impunity
 - a. by monitoring the newly established National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation in its efforts to compensate victims and to report on results of the monitoring, and
 - b. by urging the government to set up a national Truth and Reconciliation Commission to provide for transparency and justice.
3. To provide economic opportunities and political participation and stability for all victims of the conflict
 - a. through ongoing advocacy and empowerment efforts on behalf of vulnerable groups such as indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians, and
 - b. by urging the government to create more effective social and economic programmes of civil integration for all demilitarised former combatants.
4. To attend to the needs of all victims of the conflict
 - a. by elevating awareness of the conflict's effects on women and children, and providing programmes which more directly support vulnerable women and children who have been internally displaced from conflict zones, and
 - b. by taking leadership to develop a programme which deals specifically with the various aspects of HIV/AIDS – a disease which has ravaged other parts of the world characterised by ongoing violence.

Recommendations to the government of Colombia

1. To end the conflict
 - a. by promoting just and ongoing negotiations with illegal armed actors which aim to end the conflict without supporting impunity for the perpetrators,
 - b. by improving the legal framework that would guarantee the dismantling of the illegal armed groups' financial and other structures, and
 - c. by working against the militarisation of the regions of the country.
2. To end impunity
 - a. by investigating and punishing the perpetrators of the massacre of 19 merchants as required by the July 2004 Inter-American Court for Human Rights decision and providing protection for the families of these victims who fear reprisals,
 - b. by establishing an independent judiciary with a special mandate to end -impunity on all sides and punish those who violate human rights and international humanitarian law, especially acts of violence against women. This includes supporting and strengthening the position of the Ombudsman (*Personería*) within the structures of government,
 - c. by ratifying all treaties and conventions related to Human Rights which have not yet been ratified by Colombia and by respecting equally all aspects of Human Rights law including that prohibiting the use of torture under any circumstances, and
 - d. by complying with Article III of Protocol II of the Geneva Conventions which calls for respecting the distinction between civilians and military personnel. Pax Christi opposes strategies that draw civilians into the conflict as appears to be the case of the Democratic Security Policy, *Plan Colombia*, and *Plan Patriota*.
3. To provide economic opportunities and political participation and stability for all victims of the conflict
 - a. by providing resources and support to the victims in the conflict by empowering, through non-military means, their secure return to lands from which they have been displaced and by providing reparation and supporting processes of reconciliation among those who have suffered severe losses at the hands of one party or another,
 - b. by developing economic alternatives and productive and recreational opportunities for youth and for those currently at risk of being recruited into the conflict, and
 - c. by ceasing fumigation as a method for control of coca production and seeking alternatives such as manual crop eradication coupled with economic incentive to farmers to produce essential food crops,
4. To attend to the needs of all victims of the conflict
 - a. by continuing a sustainable process for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) which would demobilize all combatants and assist them to integrate into economic and social life while giving priority to truth, justice and reconciliation and reparation to the victims of the conflict. Criminal acts should be judged accordingly. Weapons collection programmes for the civil society at large should accompany DDR programmes. A (long term) process of truth and reconciliation should be developed, including the establishment of a national commission to guide such a process,
 - b. To reform the judicial system, promoting an independent judiciary, full respect for the rule of law and appropriate separation of civilian and military functions and processes.

- c. Give greater attention to the health impacts of the conflict, particularly HIV/AIDS which is often spread more rapidly in situations of conflict through rapes and war-related crimes.

Recommendations to the illegal armed actors – the Guerrillas and the Paramilitaries

1. To end the conflict
 - a. to sustain or enter into dialogue with the Colombian government toward a just and lasting peace.
 - b. by ending all actions which exploit the use of drug cultivation and trafficking as a means of continuing illegal armed conflict, and
 - c. by ending all conflict-related activities in neighbouring countries such as Venezuela and Ecuador.
2. To end impunity

In the context of the DDR, by acting to close all networks and structures related to the illegal drug traffic and arms trades. All weapons should be turned in and destroyed. Leaders should confess their crimes, return stolen goods and provide compensation for victims.
3. To attend to the needs of all victims of the conflict
 - a. by ending the practice of intimidation and/or blackmail designed to force or attract young people to join the armed groups,
 - b. by ending systemic violence against women,
 - c. by acting immediately to respect all aspects of international humanitarian law in treatment of all civilians – releasing all hostages and ceasing the attacks on, and intimidation of, civilians.
 - d. by respecting international humanitarian law and the rights of children, immediately ceasing the practice of recruiting children into the ranks, to release those children currently being used for either combat or to serve the combatants in one way or other, and by ceasing the practice of kidnapping and extortion.
 - e. by respecting all those who have left the armed groups individually or collectively and who participate in the DDR programmes.

Recommendations to the United Nations and the International Community

1. To end the conflict
 - a. by supporting the recommendations of the United Nations Commission for Human Rights as an agreed-upon multilateral framework for improving the rule of law in Colombia
 - b. by engaging in and promoting political negotiations between the armed parties in the conflict with guarantees of truth, justice and reparations.
2. To end impunity

by monitoring and supporting both the individual and collective demobilisation processes.
3. To provide economic opportunities and political participation and stability for all victims of the conflict
 - a. by promoting a new international dialogue on trafficking in illicit drugs. To stop the current ineffective and harmful fumigation programme as a means of crop eradication, and
 - b. by working for the political recognition of the on-going humanitarian crisis and the rights of the victims of the war – especially the internally displaced - and support the alleviation of this

crisis, the protection of the rights of the victims of war and long-term sustainable solutions such as economic and social development.

4. To attend to the needs of all the victims in the conflict
by including ethnic and gender perspectives in peace-building in Colombia.

Recommendations to the United States

1. To end the conflict

by reducing US demand for drugs through evidence-based prevention strategies and improved access to high quality treatment.

2. To end impunity

a) by using US leverage far more vigorously in support of human rights and the rule of law, through both diplomatic measures and the conditioning of foreign assistance, and

b) by supporting a strong judiciary and an independent human rights sector. Such a judiciary would assist in the complete dismantling of paramilitary forces and structures within an effective legal framework for justice, truth and reparations.

3. To provide economic opportunities and political participation and stability for all victims of the conflict

by making trade policy, both in multilateral and bilateral frameworks, consistent with effective anti-drug policy and human rights. This would include protection for Colombia's small farmers in AFTA (Andean Free Trade Association) to assist them in avoiding economic shocks which would encourage them to turn to illegal drug production.

4. To attend to the needs of all victims in the conflict

a) by increasing and improving humanitarian assistance while expanding protection for displaced persons and refugees, and

b) by closing the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHISC) - formerly called School of the Americas - whose graduates have been linked to some of the worst human rights abuses in the Western Hemisphere including Colombia.

Recommendations to the European Union

1. To end the conflict

a. by working to end harmful European involvements in the Colombian conflict, e.g. exportation of chemicals by European companies which can be used for illegal drug production, allowing the laundering of money from drugs and arms trafficking.

b. by working to eliminate European funds which fuel the war through a strict control of income source. Such control can be achieved by using international intelligence to dismantle criminal rings which kidnap people on behalf of armed groups and to impede payment of ransom money.

2. To provide economic opportunities, political participation, and stability for all victims of the conflict

a. by developing policy to promote a global strategy of peace through strengthening the state, the rule of law and social organisations. For such a circumstance to occur, the EU's relations with Colombia (through dialogue, political co-operation and commercial agreements) should promote lasting peace, sustainable development, and an integral policy of respect for human

rights and international humanitarian law. They should also incorporate mechanisms to overcome impunity, strengthen the experiences of democratic and participatory governance and implement agrarian reform.

b. by channelling its development funds for peace to support a comprehensive rural development strategy and to strengthen civilian governance in rural areas, and

c. by framing its humanitarian aid in such a way that the beneficiaries of the programme share in the responsibility for its design.

3. To attend to the needs of all victims in the conflict

by re-evaluating the effectiveness of the Peace Laboratories programme in light of ongoing criticism about its politicisation. Pax Christi recommends that the EU aim to preserve autonomy in the implementation of programmes with the objectives of peace, sustainable development and human rights, and with a special emphasis on the protection of the organisations that take part in the programme.

Pax Christi believes that the members of its movement have a special responsibility in peace-building. Pax Christi International firmly commits itself to accompanying the Catholic Church and other partners in Colombia as they nurture hope through action for peace with social justice and reconciliation. The movement will use its consultative status with the United Nations, as well as its access to other international organizations and the media, to communicate what we have experienced and to support and make known in as many places as possible, the work for peace in Colombia of so many committed people and organizations.